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1980 heroin bust call CIA set-up

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ALEXANDRIA, Va. — A well-connected Iranian immigrant smuggled more than \$50 million worth of heroin into the United States, telling friends the CIA would use the money to finance the overthrow of the Khomeini regime.

Instead of helping pull off a coup in his homeland, the immigrant, Shahrohk Bakhtiar, 39, found himself behind bars in the United States, a victim of a Drug Enforcement Administration trap.

Bakhtiar and two of his Iranian friends were convicted of heroin trafficking. Bakhtiar was abandoned by the intelligence agency that recruited him.

The Sunday News Journal has pieced together the details of the operation from federal wiretap logs and interviews with intelligence officials and principals in the case. They show:

- In early 1979, present and former CIA men approached Bakhtiar and asked him to refrain from filing suit against top CIA officials and the fallen shah for the assassination of Bakhtiar's father.

- In exchange, Bakhtiar was told that if he assisted the CIA in helping his cousin (former prime minister Shahpour Bakhtiar) overthrow Khomeini, the CIA would see that he got his share of his father's half-billion dollar estate.

- CIA officials told Bakhtiar that under Carter administration orders they couldn't finance the coup, but if Bakhtiar was willing to travel to Iran to tap into the heroin resources of his family, the agency could provide him with a "safe" buyer to raise the money.

- Bakhtiar's friends warned him

that the scheme might be a trap to silence him but he ignored their admonitions.

Bakhtiar's father, Teymour, had been the second most powerful man in Iran until 1973. His friendship with such CIA luminaries as Richard M. Helms and others would come to haunt his son.

The elder Bakhtiar headed the SAVAK, the royal government's secret police and intelligence service.

Teymour Bakhtiar, on a visit to Iraq in 1973, was slain by two assassins sent in by the shah, according to CIA sources and Khomeini sympathizer Mehdi Samari.

As a young man, Shahrohk Bakhtiar grew up in Switzerland and attended the same schools as men like his father, the shah and former CIA Director Helms. Helms was a longtime family friend and former ambassador to Iran.

In early 1979 when the shah was thrown out, Bakhtiar decided to sue the U.S. government and the shah for the death of his father in the hopes of recovering a share of his father's estate. That estate is estimated by State Department sources to approach \$600 million.

A visit to famed Attorney Louis Nizer in early 1979 convinced Bakhtiar he had little legal hope of breaking loose any of the hundreds of millions his father left in Swiss accounts.

Donald E. Deneselya, a former CIA officer and friend of Bakhtiar, said: "Mike Bakhtiar was set up. He was in a position to reveal all kinds of things about CIA activities in Iran during the regime of the shah, and had threatened to do so in a lawsuit. The CIA sent old family friends around to ask him to help out. They wanted him to forget the suit, in exchange they would help get his share of his father's estate."

According to Deneselya, Bakhtiar became convinced in his dealings with SAVAK agents in the United States that the shah had betrayed his father on the advice of top CIA officials whom he had believed were loyal family friends.

Accordingly, he inadvertently tipped off Helms and the CIA that he was thinking about legal action when he approached Helms' lawyer, Edward Bennett Williams, about taking on the wrongful death case. Williams could not be reached for comment.

DENESELYA said Bakhtiar then became more secretive about his activities and ignored warnings not to deal with the CIA.

By the late summer of 1979, Bakhtiar was meeting CIA contacts on the deal to import heroin to help overthrow the revolutionary regime and install his cousin, Shahpour, in power.

The CIA contact who was to find Bakhtiar a "safe buyer" for the heroin was another Iranian. What Bakhtiar did not know was that his contact was a Drug Enforcement Agency plant, and more important, an informant of the Khomeini secret police, called SAVAMA.

The informant used the assumed name of Michael D. Burke.

Burke's existence and his intelligence ties to Iran were closely guarded DEA secrets that were kept from the federal court judge and public in the April 1980 drug trial of Bakhtiar.

Today, Bakhtiar sits in Petersburg (Va.) Federal Correctional Institution serving a 15-year sentence for heroin trafficking. Co-defendant Mohammed Roshan is finishing the last four months of his sentence for aiding and abetting in the heroin purchase. He is in federal prison at Danbury, Conn.

Another conspirator, Reza Mianegaz, got the shortest of the three sentences and is now free. But both Roshan and Mianegaz face deportation proceedings.

Bakhtiar, who has steadfastly remained silent about the case, faces four more years in prison before he can be considered for parole.

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